

# Measles immunisation: Questions and Answers

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A factsheet (available in various languages) with key information about measles immunisation is available at [ProtectAgainstMeasles.org.nz](https://ProtectAgainstMeasles.org.nz) or on the [campaign resources page](#). Below are some starter questions and answers as a basis for social media responses. It's important to moderate and/or respond to comments in a timely manner. We recommend checking your accounts at least once a day in case any important comments or messages need a response.

## Social Media Starter Responses

### How serious is measles? Should I be worried?

Measles is a serious disease that can make you very sick. It spreads fast.

Lots of people aged between 15 and 30 years didn't get fully immunised when they were children. This puts you at risk of catching and spreading measles.

Measles can be life threatening. About 1 in 10 people with measles will need to go to hospital. It can be more harmful for our hapū māmā and our younger whānau or if you are being treated for cancer or a severe illness.

### Is measles in Aotearoa?

In Aotearoa, more than 2,000 people got measles in 2019. 700 had to go to hospital. Māori and Pacific peoples were particularly affected. We need 95 percent of people to be immune to reach 'community immunity' (sometimes known as 'herd immunity') and help stop future outbreaks.

Although measles isn't currently here, it is still common in many countries. It's only a plane ride away. People can bring it into New Zealand without knowing. You could also be exposed if you travel to certain countries overseas.

Getting immunised is the best way to protect you, your whānau and community from catching and spreading measles.

### How do I get measles?

Measles virus is highly contagious. It is spread through the air by infected droplets or by direct contact with secretions from the nose or throat of infected persons, for example by touching

contaminated items or surfaces. It can survive for up to 2 hours in the air. A person with measles is most contagious from when symptoms start until three to four days after the rash appears.

Anyone who has not received at least one dose of a measles-containing vaccine or who has not already had the disease is at risk of catching measles.

### **How do I find out whether I need a measles immunisation?**

The best way to find out is to ask your GP or health provider. If they have your records, they can check for you.

If you don't have records and are unsure if you're immunised, it's ok to get immunised again.

### **Is it *free* to get an immunisation? Where can I get an MMR immunisation?**

Yes, it's free!

You can get your *free* measles immunisation from your health provider. You can also get one from a participating pharmacy if you're over 16 – you don't need an appointment, just turn up. The pharmacist will take you to a private space in the pharmacy to get your immunisation.

### **I think I had at least one measles shot, but I'm not sure. What should I do?**

If you're not sure, it's ok to get immunised again.

If your GP or health provider has your records, they can check whether you have had it. Usually, it's given in childhood – now at 12 months or 15 months. If you missed out, talk with your health provider or a participating pharmacist (if you're over 16) to get immunised.

### **What's in the vaccine?**

The MMR vaccine is made of small amounts of weakened forms of the measles, mumps and rubella germs. These trigger your immune system to make antibodies to fight the germs. The vaccine has a few other ingredients to keep it stable and ready to go. These ingredients are in tiny amounts and also found in common foods and drinks. Vaccine ingredients are published in their data sheets, available on the Medsafe website, and explained in more detail at <https://www.immune.org.nz/vaccines/vaccine-development/vaccine-components>.

## How safe is the MMR vaccine?

The MMR vaccine has an excellent safety record and is very effective. It has been used in New Zealand for 30 years, since 1990. After one dose, about 95 percent of people are protected from measles and after two doses, more than 99 percent of people are protected.

A small number of people who are fully immunised may still get sick, but they usually get a milder illness than people who haven't been immunised. Fewer than one in 10 people may get a mild response between five and 12 days after immunisation, like a mild fever, a rash or swollen glands. Other mild reactions that can happen (usually within one or two days of being immunised) include:

- headache
- a slight fever (feeling hot)
- nausea (feeling sick)
- fainting or feeling faint (eating beforehand helps with this)
- feeling a bit unwell.

The benefits of immunisation are huge – immunisation reduces deaths, hospitalisations, permanent health damage and serious illness. The chance of having a serious side-effect from the MMR vaccine is extremely rare – far less likely than the risk of serious illness as a result of catching measles, mumps or rubella. If a severe allergic reaction does happen, the vaccinator can effectively treat it. That's why you'll be asked to stay for 20 minutes after. Your doctor, nurse or pharmacist will talk about possible reactions with you at the time.

There are very few people who can't be immunised. Talk with your health professional if you've had a serious reaction to a vaccine in the past, are being treated for cancer or a severe illness, or had a blood transfusion in the last year. You can't have the MMR vaccine when you're pregnant.

If you'd like a little more independent information about the science and safety of immunisation there's a great website provided by the Immunisation Advisory Centre ([www.immune.org.nz](http://www.immune.org.nz)). You can also call Freephone 0800 IMMUNE (466 863) if you want to talk directly to a health professional.

## Can you get other diseases from the measles vaccination?

No.

The MMR vaccine protects you against measles, mumps and rubella and stops you spreading these diseases to your whānau and community. If enough people are immunised the diseases can't easily spread.